

Zechariah

Chapter 3

VI. Vision 4: Joshua the High Priest - Zechariah 3:1-10

3:1 And he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right hand to resist him. **3:2** And the LORD said unto Satan, The LORD rebuke thee, O Satan; even the LORD that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee: [is] not this a brand plucked out of the fire? **3:3** Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments, and stood before the angel. **3:4** And he answered and spake unto those that stood before him, saying, Take away the filthy garments from him. And unto him he said, Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment. **3:5** And I said, Let them set a fair mitre upon his head. So they set a fair mitre upon his head, and clothed him with garments. And the angel of the LORD stood by. **3:6** And the angel of the LORD protested unto Joshua, saying, **3:7** Thus saith the LORD of hosts; If thou wilt walk in my ways, and if thou wilt keep my charge, then thou shalt also judge my house, and shalt also keep my courts, and I will give thee places to walk among these that stand by. **3:8** Hear now, O Joshua the high priest, thou, and thy fellows that sit before thee: for they [are] men wondered at: for, behold, I will bring forth my servant the BRANCH. **3:9** For behold the stone that I have laid before Joshua; upon one stone [shall be] seven eyes: behold, I will engrave the graving thereof, saith the LORD of hosts, and I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day. **3:10** In that day, saith the LORD of hosts, shall ye call every man his neighbour under the vine and under the fig tree.

This is the fourth vision of eight that Zechariah received in a single night. The purpose of these visions is to comfort the Jews who had returned to the land to rebuild Jerusalem and re-establish temple worship.

The first three visions had to do with promised glory and restoration. In the first vision, we find God ready to intervene in the behalf of Israel. In the second and third visions we find promises regarding the future glory of Jerusalem and Israel.

This vision reveals the basis of God's blessing, the cleansing of Israel. Although God desires to bless his people, specifically Israel in this case, he could not because of sin. It was the sin and disobedience of Israel that resulted in the captivity, and if God is going to be able to bless Israel, something must be done with their sin.

Zechariah 3:1

This vision contains three main characters, Joshua the high priest, the angel of the Lord, and Satan. The latter two characters need little introduction, however, Joshua deserves a little attention as to his identity and significance.

When the Israelites returned from captivity after the decree of Cyrus the Persian, we find four key figures; Nehemiah, Ezra, Joshua, and Zerubbabel. Nehemiah was instrumental in rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. Ezra the scribe called the people back to God through the reading and explanation of the scriptures. Both of these men figure prominently in the restoration of Jerusalem.

Whereas Nehemiah and Ezra were the men used by God to spur Israel to action, Zerubbabel and Joshua were the true leaders. Zerubbabel was in the kingly line of David (Matthew 1:12) and as such was the "king" of Israel. Joshua the son of Jehozadek, functioned as the high priest. These two men, therefore, represented the civil and spiritual leadership of Israel. (See the following references on these two men: Haggai 1:1,12,14; Haggai 2:2,4; Nehemiah 12:1; Ezra 3:2,8; Ezra 4:3; and Ezra 5:2) It is of further interest to note that Zerubbabel and Joshua are often mentioned together. This seems to indicate that these men worked quite closely in the restoration of Jerusalem and temple worship.

Thus we see that Joshua the high priest was the spiritual representative of God before Israel. This should come as no surprise since the high priest, on the day of atonement, would go into the holy of the holies and sprinkle blood as the representative of the nation of Israel. The identification of Joshua as being the representative of Israel before God is crucial in understanding this vision.

Now, back in Zechariah 3:1 we begin to see some of the significance of this vision. In this verse, we find Joshua, as the representative of Israel, standing before the angel of the Lord with Satan at his right hand to resist him. This is a most graphic picture of Satan's activities. Satan is seen in the scripture as the "accuser of the brethren". In the book of Job, chapters 1 and 2, we find Satan challenging the character and righteousness of Job before God. No doubt Satan was doing the same thing here to the entire nation of Israel. The sad thing is that what Satan was probably accusing the nation of Israel of was true.

The word "standing" is used of priests in reference to their service before the Lord. Refer to Deuteronomy 10:8, 18:5, 2 Chronicles 5:14, 29:11, and Hebrews 10:11. Thus, we infer that this vision pictures Joshua in his high priestly role standing before the lord as the spiritual representative of Israel.

Zechariah 3:2

We are now at a crucial point in this vision. If the angel of the Lord accepts the accusations against Joshua, which means he accepts the accusations against Israel, then there can be no chance for blessing. However, if Joshua is somehow vindicated, then the sin of Israel has been forgiven and blessing is available.

There are many who cannot see the Trinity in the Old Testament. How they can not see it is beyond me especially in light of this verse. Note that the angel of the Lord (= Christ), speaks unto Satan and says "the Lord (= God the Father) rebuke you ... ". We have already seen one example of this intertrinitarian dialogue in chapter 1 where we find the angel of the Lord crying out to God in behalf of Jerusalem. We may not understand the Trinity, but it's existence can hardly be argued.

It is interesting to see that Joshua is described as "a brand plucked from the fire". This refers to the fact that God sees humanity in a position of imminent judgment and condemnation. It is only by his grace that anyone is redeemed.

Zechariah 3:3

This verse is most interesting in the Hebrew since the word used to speak of the "filthy" garments refer to "excrement covered" garments. Not only was Joshua

standing in the presence of the Lord with dirty garments, but he was standing there with the most vile garments imaginable.

This should remind us of the fact that "all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags". The word used by Isaiah in Isaiah 64:6 to refer to "rags" means "menstrual cloths". One of the biggest con jobs a man can pull on himself is to think that his good works are acceptable to God. According to Isaiah, all our human works amount to nothing more than vile, unclean menstrual cloths. It is only through the power and presence of the Holy Spirit that we can offer up "spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God". (1 Peter 2:5).

By the way, "the angel" can refer to none other than the angel of the Lord.

Zechariah 3:4-5

These verses contain one of the most graphic pictures of God's forgiveness found in scripture. Joshua, standing before the angel of the Lord in excrement covered garments, is given a clean change of clothes. The imagery of clean clothes is used several times in the scripture to refer to the process of forgiveness. In Revelation 19:8 we find that the Church is arrayed in white linen which represents the righteousness of the saints. Christ uses the picture of clothing in the Parable of the Marriage of the King's Son in Matthew 22:2-14 in which the clothing refers to the imputed righteousness required of those in the Kingdom. Paul uses the imagery of changing clothes in Ephesians 4:22-24 and Colossians 3:8-10 to refer to the believers act of taking off the old life and putting on the new.

It is one of the amazing things of God's grace that he forgives us, gives us a new change of garments, and then rewards us for our righteousness!

However, the Lord does not stop with a mere change of clothes, but orders that a mitre be put on Joshua's head. This was a symbol that not only was the Joshua's sin forgiven, but righteousness and honor was given to Joshua as well. This is one of the things that we have because of our salvation. God has not only forgiven our sins, which returns us to a zero point, but adds the righteousness of Christ on top of that. Thus, in a sense, we are better off than Adam was in his innocence. Although Adam had no sin, he had no righteousness either. However, we not only have the forgiveness of God which wipes out our past debt of sin, but we have Christ's righteousness which leaves us with an infinite credit balance. It is like a millionaire wiping out all of your debts and giving you ten million dollars to boot.

Zechariah 3:6-7

It is one of the characteristics of forgiveness that those forgiven are called to obedience. The idea that one can receive the forgiveness of God without any thought to obedience is foreign to scripture. This concept is seen clearly in these two verses.

As we have already mentioned, Joshua represents the nation of Israel. God, in his sovereign grace, has forgiven Israel of their sin. However, that does not give Israel the freedom to continue in disobedience. Because of that, we find the angel of the Lord giving a divine charge to Israel calling them to obedience. Specifically, we see two conditions for continued blessing, and three promises given to the obedient.

The two conditions for blessing are universal requirements binding for anyone desiring a right relationship with God; walking in God's ways, and keeping God's charge. To walk in God's ways is to set one's heart on a life of obedience to the paths of God. Specifically it refers to a path of obedience whereby one's activities and actions are done with a view to God's complete control over their life. The second condition is closely coupled with the first, namely obedience to God's commands. Those who desire a close walk with God must obey his commands from the heart. It is ludicrous for a person to think that they can live without any thought to obedience and yet experience the blessing of God. Another way to look at these two conditions is to see walking as the direction and obedience as the attitude.

Israel is promised that if they keep these two conditions, they will judge God's house, keep his courts, and have the promise of future inheritance in glory. Judging God's house can be understood as the privilege of being a steward of God. Israel was the steward of God in the sense that it was through them blessing was to come upon the whole world. Keeping his courts has to do with the spiritual intercessorship Israel performed. Under the Old Covenant the way to God was through the sacrificial system of worship. Finally, the promise of future inheritance in heaven is reserved only for those who obey God and live according to his commandments. The way of salvation in all periods of human history is the same, obedience and faith in all that God had revealed to that point. We have the full revelation of God and therefore must believe in Christ as our substitute. In the Old Testament times, however, one was "saved" by obeying the commandments of God out of a proper heart attitude. It was this obedience to God's command that saved Abraham

Zechariah 3:8-10

These three verses are some of the hardest to interpret in the book of Zechariah. They basically contain Messianic prophecies regarding Christ's position and work.

First, Christ is spoken of as "THE BRANCH". We know this is a reference to Messiah by comparing this verse with Zechariah 6:12 and Isaiah 53:1-2 and 11:1-2. We also have a messianic reference to "the sprout" in Jeremiah 23:5 and 33:15. That "THE BRANCH" refers to the Messiah is of little doubt.

Secondly, Christ is seen as a "stone". The Messiah was seen as a stone in Psalms 118:22, Isaiah 28:16, Matthew 21:42, and 1 Peter 2:4-8. However, in this passage we see the stone as having "seven eyes". This is very difficult to interpret dogmatically, but perhaps can be understood as indicating the fact that the Messiah will have perfect wisdom. In the scriptures, eyes often are used to speak of wisdom and seven is the number of perfection. Hence, seven eyes equal perfect wisdom. Also, God himself will engrave this stone. The Messiah will receive honor from God not only because of his exalted position as ruler, but because of his humble service as savior. Note "servant" in verse 8.

Verse 10 is a promise of future peace. The phrase "under the vine and under the fig tree" refer to a condition of prosperity and freedom from war. Refer to Isaiah 36:6 and Micah 4:4 where this is clearly seen.

Thus this fourth vision, like the others, promises future glory and peace but with the view that it is made possible by the cleansing of the nation of Israel. This cleansing is also seen in Zechariah 12:10 where we find the spirit of grace and supplication poured out on Jerusalem.